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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a method of identifying classroom social structures that can be used by teachers involved with writing behavioral objectives and Individualized Education Plans (IEP). By measuring the classroom environment, one has a greater probability of achieving the desired learning environment. A sociometric test enables the teacher to know where to begin and how to arrange the necessary conditions for learning. Because the test is not standardized, a personal procedure should be established so that sociograms can be compared over a period of time. Assumptions, procedures, and uses of this sociometric technique are stated, followed by a list of precautionary guidelines. The method is described in eight steps and involves students' selections of peers to work with (or not to work with) on small projects. All choices are kept secret by the teacher and used to plot the sociograms. It is noted that some students may be reluctant to make choices and that students are generally hesitant in making the negative choices, even though they are kept secret. Students' social skills, isolated students, and cliques become apparent, and the teacher can observe more accurately the students' attitudes towards their classmates. (FG)

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The Sociometric IEP

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Abstract

How to give a sociometric test and plot the results on a sociogram are discussed. This paper presents a simplification of previously published procedures and presents a useful modification - the negative sociogram. Applications for sociometry in educational planning for the exceptional learner are discussed.

The Sociometric IEP

Background

Virtually all current texts on child-adolescent development and educational psychology speak to the importance of maintaining an 'optimal' learning environment in the classroom. One must somehow create a pleasant, nonstressing social climate which then leads, so it is predicted, to group cohesiveness, mutual support and help, and ultimately to increased personal development and school achievement. However, few texts ever get down to basics and show how to do so. This is especially important when one realizes that today many handicapped students are being mainstreamed just for these social reasons.

Two of the newer texts do present one way to begin to accomplish these goals (LeFrancois, 1981; Woolfolk & Nicolich, 1980). The technique advocated by these authors is sociometric testing. By actually measuring the classroom social environment one has a far greater probability of achieving the desired 'optimal' learning environment. The sociometric test is used a pretest thereby, as advocated by Galloway (1976), enabling the classroom teacher to know where to begin and how to arrange the necessary conditions for learning. This technique is especially useful to the teacher involved with writing behavioral objectives and Individual Educational Plans (IEPs).

Assumptions

While much has been written on sociometry, the techniques appear to have fallen into relative disuse in recent years. The reasons for this may be, as earlier speculated by Gronlund(1959), the lack of reliability and validity data. With today's sophisticated measurement techniques the psychometrist tends to shy from nonstandardized instruments. Although attempts have been made to validate sociometric measures they have been on a small scale and composed of selected samples. Thus, we are presently left with a less rigorously doccumented research base than in other measurement areas such as achievement testing.

With this in mind the writer will make the following assumptions as a basis from which to apply sociometric techniques to the classroom.

1. There is an underlying social structure in each classroom.
2. The social structure the teacher sees is not necessarily the one seen by the students.
3. The social structure is dynamic and will change from class to class as well as over time.
4. The social structure may be graphically represented as a sociogram.
5. The social structure may be simplified into positive and negative sociograms representing liked and disliked persons respectively.
6. Data obtained from the sociograms are sufficiently reliable and valid to be of use in educational programming.

Procedure

Although construction of a sociogram is not the same as giving a 'stand-

ard' psychometric instrument, there are a number of procedures which should be followed. It is desirable for the person using this technique to standardize a personal procedure so results may be compared from one sociogram to the next. The following is suggested by this writer as an efficient method. It combines the ideas of a number of researchers and the writer's own research into a simple, quickly administered procedure.

Step 1. Tell the class that a number of projects will be comming up during the school year in which the opportunity to work together in small groups will arise. In order that you (the teacher) might make the best group assignments you need to have each student's help. You would like to know with whom each student would like to work. Stress that decisions should be made carefully as groups will not be changed for a period of time.

Step 2. On a blank slip of paper have each student write the names of the two students with whom they would like to work with. They are to put their own name at the top of the slips, fold the slips, and turn them in to you. Students should be cautioned that all choices are 'secret'. They are not to look at nor discuss each other's choices.

While some authors recommend the use of three or even four choices, this writer has found two choices to be adequate for instructional purposes while being far easier to diagram and interpret. Occasionally a child will be reluctant to choose only two peers. In these cases one should request the child to choose two 'very best' friends. Do not, however, force the issue. A more frequently encountered situation is the student who will choose no one. Ask if there are friends with whom to work; but again, do not force unnatural choices.

Step 3. Compile all names in a three column table. You will have one line for each class member. To the right of each student's name will be the names of choices. Table 1 is an example of how one eighth grade class responded. The reader will note that some students made no choices while others were not themselves chosen.

Step 4. Each student should now be represented on the sociogram. Typically the graph is drawn on a sheet of typing paper. It is suggested that two symbols be chosen to represent males and females. One now proceeds down the class choice list and plots each student's choices as arrows extending to the symbols of those chosen. There will be one symbol for each class member and one arrow for each choice.

Step 5. Redraw the sociogram eliminating as many crossing lines and shortening all lines as much as possible inorder to emphasize groupings which may be seen to emerge. Figure 1 illustrates a completed sociogram.

Step 6. Identify elements of the class social structure (sociogram) you have drawn. Look for the student receiving the most choices (class leader), the ones receiving/making no choices (isolates), and those who make but do not receive choices (fringe or would be group members). It will be possible, in addition, to identify 'natural' or clique groups as illustrated in Figure 1 by Scott, Lonnie, and Darren.

Step 7. Interpret the sociogram with followup study as needed. Remember: Your perceptions of the class will probably be different from that of your students. As an example: One might be tempted to group Charlotte with Renee and Penny. However, closer observation revealed an intense rivalry between

these two girls for Charlotte's attention. Charlotte, while greatly enjoying this, agravated the conflict by playing Renee and Penny against each other. Thus, grouping these three girls would be a disaster while Francie, Page, and Cindy would be satisfactory.

Step 8. As an aide to interpretation you may wish to plot a negative sociogram. The procedures are the same as steps 1 - 7 with one exception: Choices are to be persons with whom each student would not like to work. Students are generally more hesitant to make this type choice. Indeed, some do not choose. However, in many cases we quickly learn a great deal about a class when student cooperation is gained. It would save time if negative choises are listed at the same time that positive choices are made (see Table 1). The completed negative sociogram is shown in Figure 2.

In this example one has little trouble in identifying the problem spots, Renee and Mike. This came as a surprise to Mike's teacher who reported: "I was surprised...he does not bother anyone...he is just a loner."

Uses

Once the teacher has this tool in hand many uses will become apparent. With today's educational mandate of equal opportunity for each child we must consider the class social structure in forming our educational objectives. While not addressing specific objectives, Caldwell (1959) lists the following general classroom uses:

1. Identifying those lacking in basic social skills.
2. Selecting students for projects, teams, and study groups.
3. Analyzing cliques.

4. Evaluating the progress of socialization [particularly useful with preschoolers and kindergarten students].
5. Promoting leadership opportunities.
6. Giving clues for working with the shy, the bully, and the anti-social child. (To this we would today add the mainstreamed child.)
7. Analyzing social structure in terms of racial, economic, religious, etc. differences.
8. Giving clues for working with discipline cases.
9. Discovering the social status of an individual student.

Northway and Weld (1957), however, prefer to use the sociogram to provide "a socially free environment" stating that adults should let students make as many decisions as possible and to recognize those decisions they have made. They caution that many of our discipline problems in the school may be the result of too much social control, of not letting students make decisions [such as where to sit and with whom to work].

Cautions

It is recommended that the following set of guidelines be followed when using this technique:

1. Do not let students see each other's choices or the completed sociogram. This is especially true for the negative portion.
2. Students should be regrouped immediately upon completion of the sociogram.
3. Begin grouping with the unchosen and children with few choices. These children tend to be more sensitive than do those with many friends.

4. Try to group reciprocal choices when possible.
5. The classroom may initially be more unruly but will soon settle down and begin to work more efficiently than previously.
6. Use the sociogram. It is an instructional tool and not a test score to be placed in the students' records.

Summary

Through use of this technique the teacher has a means of reaching students through the peer group. This will include some students who were previously not seen as having special needs. Whether writing general class goals or specific behavioral objectives or implementing an IEP for a specific student the sociogram will enable creation of a more meaningful classroom environment. This is essential when dealing with the mainstreamed child. Simply placing the exceptional child in a regular classroom does not guarantee social interaction. It may in fact do just the opposite. The exceptional child may become a social isolate. The factor of social environment must be taken into consideration when writing IEPs and making class placements.

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Table 1

Class Choices

student	choices-positive	choices-negative
Misty	Lisa, Randy	Page, -----
Lisa	Misty, Sage	Page, Renee
Randy	Lisa, -----	Renee, Mike
Wesley	Randy, Joey	Renee, Page
Joey	Lisa, Sage	Renee, -----
John	Scott, Maria, Charlotte	Joey, -----
Sage	Lisa, -----	Page, Renee
Karen	Sage, Charolette	Renee, Page
Renee	Charolette, Sage	Penny, Mike
Maria	Lisa, Charolette	Joey, Renee
Charolette	Penny, Renee	Mike, Jeff
Penny	Charolette, Jackie	Mike, Jeff
Jackie	Karen, Cindy	Chris, Mike
Francie	Page, Cindy	John, Wesley
Page	Cindy, Francie	-----,-----
Cindy	Jackie, Mikel	Mike, Renee
Gina	Cindy, Rena	Maria, Mike
Brenda	Rena, Gina	Joey, Mike
Rena	-----,-----	Jeff, Maria
Mikel	Jeff, Chris	Karen, Brenda
Chris	Jeff, John	Gina, Renee
Jeff	Mikel, Page	Renee, -----
Mike	Jeff, Chris	Misty, Rena
Dan	Charolette, Darren	Francie, Joey
Darren	Lonnie, Dan	Mike, Jeff
Lonnie	Darren, Scott	Jeff, Mike
Scott	Lonnie, Darren	Jeff, Joey

* Class is eighth grade civics

Figure 1

Sociogram-Positive

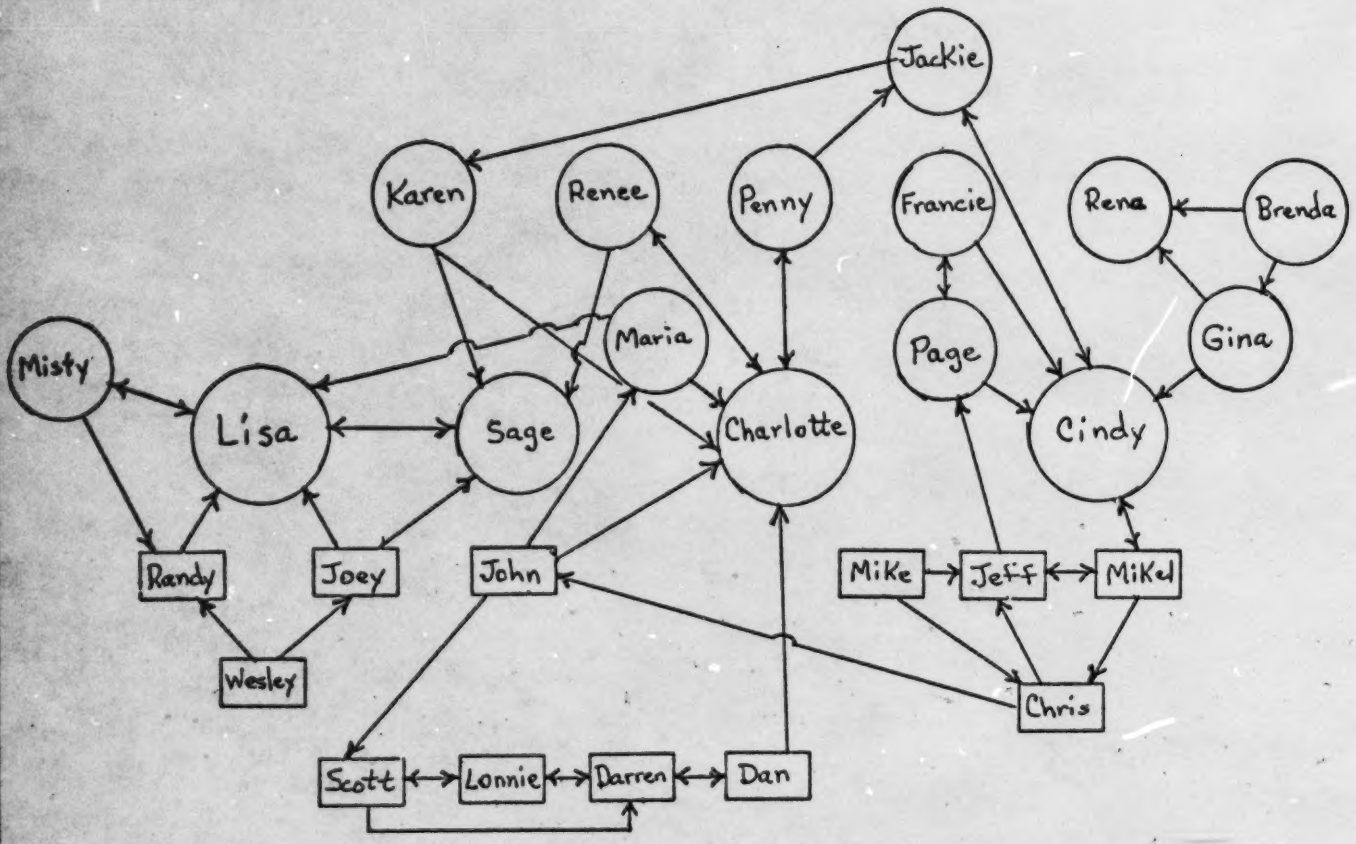

Figure 2

Sociogram-Negative